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Patent Application for:

SUPER DISTRIBUTION OF MUSIC SAMPLES USING EMAIL

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7 **SUPER DISTRIBUTION OF MUSIC SAMPLES USING EMAIL**
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11 **FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

12 This invention relates generally to the field of electronic distribution of audio
13 (or video) recordings. More particularly, this invention relates to a so-called super
14 distribution techniques.
15

16 **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

17 In recent years, providing samples of a musical selection has become a
18 popular marketing tool for record companies as well as other organizations
19 marketing music. By creating electronic samples of a computer readable audio
20 file, the samples can be distributed as a marketing tool according to various
21 electronic schemes often referred to as super distribution. Unfortunately, current
22 electronic mail applications do not provide a convenient mechanism for a user to
23 distribute such music samples. This limits the effectiveness of super distribution
24 techniques.
25

26 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

27 The present invention relates generally to electronic distribution of audio and
28 other content. Objects, advantages and features of the invention will become

1 apparent to those skilled in the art upon consideration of the following detailed
2 description of the invention.

3 In one embodiment of the present invention, a method of transmitting an
4 audio sample using electronic mail includes, within an email application program,
5 providing a platform for a sender to generate an electronic mail message to a
6 recipient; receiving a single command from the sender to attach a predefined audio
7 sample; and responsive to the sender's command to attach the predefined audio
8 sample, attaching the predefined audio sample.

9 A method of transmitting an audio sample using electronic mail, consistent
10 with an embodiment of the invention includes, within an email application program,
11 providing a platform for a sender to generate an electronic mail message to a
12 recipient; automatically attaching an audio sample to the electronic mail message;
13 receiving a command from the sender to send the electronic mail message; and
14 sending the electronic mail message to the recipient.

15 An electronic mail system consistent with an embodiment of the invention
16 includes a programmed processor and an electronic mail application running on
17 the programmed processor, the electronic mail application having a user interface
18 including a plurality of user controls to permit a sender to create and send an
19 electronic mail message to a recipient. A program forms a part of the electronic
20 mail application to attach an audio sample to an electronic mail document upon a
21 user's actuating of a single control on the user interface.

22 Another electronic mail system consistent with an embodiment of the
23 invention includes a programmed processor and an electronic mail application
24 running on the programmed processor, the electronic mail application having a
25 user interface including a plurality of user controls to permit a sender to create and
26 send an electronic mail message to a recipient. A program forming a part of the
27 electronic mail application, attaches an audio sample to all electronic mail
28 documents.

29 Another electronic mail system consistent with an embodiment of the
30 invention includes a computer network. A programmed processor forms a part of

1 the computer network. An electronic mail application runs on the programmed
2 processor, the electronic mail application having a user interface including a
3 plurality of user controls to permit a sender to create and send an electronic mail
4 message to a recipient. An enterprise email server forms a part of the computer
5 network, wherein email messages created using the electronic mail application are
6 passed through the email server. A program running on the enterprise email
7 server, attaches a audio sample to an electronic mail document sent from the
8 electronic mail application to the recipient.

9 In certain embodiments, consistent with the invention, an electronic storage
10 medium contains instructions that, when executed on a programmed processor,
11 carry out methods as described above.

12 An enterprise mail server consistent with embodiments of the invention
13 includes a mechanism for receiving an email message from a connected computer.
14 A program attaches an audio sample to the email message and sends the email
15 message with the attached audio sample to a recipient.

16 The above summaries are intended to illustrate exemplary embodiments of
17 the invention, which will be best understood in conjunction with the detailed
18 description to follow, and are not intended to limit the scope of the appended
19 claims.
20

21 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

22 The features of the invention believed to be novel are set forth with
23 particularity in the appended claims. The invention itself however, both as to
24 organization and method of operation, together with objects and advantages
25 thereof, may be best understood by reference to the following detailed description
26 of the invention, which describes certain exemplary embodiments of the invention,
27 taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

28 **FIGURE 1** illustrates a music or other audio sample within a digital music
29 file.

1 **FIGURE 2** is a high level flow chart of a music clipping process consistent
2 with embodiments of the present invention.

3 **FIGURE 3** illustrates a music sample within a digital audio file using start
4 and stop flags.

5 **FIGURE 4** illustrates a music sample within a digital audio file using a
6 header to define a sample.

7 **FIGURE 5** is a flow chart of an embodiment of a sampling technique
8 consistent with certain embodiments of the invention.

9 **FIGURE 6** is a flow chart of another embodiment of a sampling technique
10 consistent with certain embodiments of the invention.

11 **FIGURE 7** is a flow chart of a third embodiment of a sampling technique
12 consistent with certain embodiments of the invention.

13 **FIGURE 8** illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a user interface of a
14 media player that can employ a music clipping process according to embodiments
15 of the present invention.

16 **FIGURE 9** is a flow chart illustrating a music clipping and distribution
17 process consistent with certain embodiments of the present invention.

18 **FIGURE 10** is a flow chart illustrating another music clipping and distribution
19 process consistent with certain embodiments of the present invention.

20 **FIGURE 11** illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a user interface of an
21 electronic mail application consistent with certain embodiments of the present
22 invention.

23 **FIGURE 12** illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a user interface of an
24 electronic mail application showing an "Attach Menu" consistent with certain
25 embodiments of the present invention.

26 **FIGURE 13** illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a user interface of an
27 electronic mail application showing an attached audio file consistent with certain
28 embodiments of the present invention.

FIGURE 14 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a user interface of an electronic mail application showing an attached link to an audio sample consistent with certain embodiments of the present invention.

FIGURE 15 is an exemplary system block diagram of an email system using an enterprise email server according to certain embodiments of the invention.

FIGURE 16 is a flow chart illustrating the operation of the email server of **FIGURE 15** according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 17 is a flow chart illustrating a process for awarding affinity points consistent with certain embodiments of the present invention.

FIGURE 18 is a flow chart illustrating another process for awarding affinity points consistent with certain embodiments of the present invention.

FIGURE 19 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a user interface of an electronic mail application showing an attached audio file and link to purchase options consistent with certain embodiments of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

While this invention is susceptible of embodiment in many different forms, there is shown in the drawings and will herein be described in detail specific embodiments, with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as an example of the principles of the invention and not intended to limit the invention to the specific embodiments shown and described. In the description below, like reference numerals are used to describe the same, similar or corresponding parts in the several views of the drawings.

Referring now to **FIGURE 1**, a music file, or other audio file, is generally represented as 100. The music file can be viewed as a linear file of data extending from left to right as time increases in **FIGURE 1**. When streamed from a server or disc drive or the like, the music file 100 will play for a time duration shown as T_{SONG} . The desired music sample including the so-called "hook" (i.e., a memorable passage of the music that is likely to attract a potential buyer's attention), can be

1 represented as a segment of the file shown as "music sample" 104 starting at
2 times T_{START} and ending at time T_{STOP} . Depending on the individual music selection
3 and also dependent in general upon the particular genre of music, the start of the
4 hook is generally located somewhere around 45 to 60 seconds into a typical 3
5 minute popular music selection. With other genres of music, such as jazz or
6 classical music, the hook might appear significantly later or earlier. Additionally,
7 for example, 1950s rock and roll hooks typically occur somewhat sooner. Thus, the
8 start time for the sample may range from about 30 to about 60 seconds.

9 Generally speaking, current mass marketed music that may benefit most
10 from the music sampling described herein falls within the category of popular
11 music. In this case, the hook typically starts, as previously noted, between 45 and
12 60 seconds into the selection. Thus, a music sample of approximately 30 seconds
13 can be generated by simply taking a clipping from the original music file starting at
14 approximately 45 to 60 seconds (or slightly earlier, e.g., 5 to 15 seconds earlier)
15 and lasting for a duration of approximately 30 seconds. For jazz or classical
16 selections, it is beneficial to take a longer music selection of perhaps 45 to 60
17 seconds since a 30 second clip may not present a representative sample of the
18 music selection.

19 Referring now to **FIGURE 2**, an overall process for creating a music clipping
20 suitable for super distribution is illustrated as process 120 that starts at 124.
21 Generally the music sample is extracted as a segment of the music selection file
22 100 at 128. At 132 the selected sample segment is compressed using any suitable
23 compression technique to reduce the file size. Any suitable compression
24 technique can be utilized for this purpose including lossy compression techniques
25 and reduction of the data rate (the streaming data rate) associated with the music
26 selection. In general, although such compression degrades the fidelity of the
27 resulting sample segment, it is more desirable to degrade the sample quality
28 somewhat then to have a resulting sample file that is large and thus more difficult
29 to readily distribute (for example, over the Internet). At 140 the process terminates
30 to return a music clipping for use. This process can be carried out by the end user,

1 retail establishment, record company, publicist, marketing concern, artist or other
2 private or commercial entity interested in promoting the audio selection.

3 In accordance with the embodiment illustrated in **FIGURE 1**, a fixed starting
4 time is defined (e.g., 45 seconds from the start of the music selection) for
5 extracting the music sample and the sample duration T_{SAMPLE} is also predefined
6 (e.g., 30 seconds) to create a generally applicable music clipping. However, other
7 techniques can also be utilized to perform the initial extraction of the sample
8 segment (i.e. 128 of **FIGURE 2**). **FIGURE 3** illustrates a second technique for
9 creating a music sample (or other audio or video sample) consistent with the
10 embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, the sample is defined
11 in the production and manufacturing process. In this technique, a preferred music
12 sample 104 is preceded by a start flag shown as 154 and may also be followed by
13 a stop flag shown as 158. Alternatively, only a start flag 154 may be used in
14 conjunction with a predefined sample time defining the stopping point. In this
15 embodiment, the sample can be automatically extracted from the file 150 by simply
16 scanning the file for the location of start flag 154 and possible stop flag 158. Such
17 flags can be readily embedded in a music file and can be ignored by the music file
18 playing or, if interpreted by the player as music data, these flags are of such short
19 duration as to be unlikely to be noticed by the human ear. The recorded audio
20 along with start and stop flags can be recorded on any suitable electronic storage
21 medium such as a compact disc.

22 A third technique for extracting a sample segment as in 128 of **FIGURE 2** is
23 illustrated in connection with the use of file 170 of **FIGURE 4**. In this example, the
24 music file 170 (or other audio or video file) includes a header 174 containing data
25 relating to the music file 170. A portion of this data in header 174 can be defined
26 to be either a starting packet number or starting time associated with the music
27 sample as well as possibly an ending packet number or ending time associated
28 with the music sample. Alternatively, a sample duration could be specified. The
29 recorded audio along with start and stop flags can be recorded on any suitable

1 electronic storage medium such as a compact disc. Many variations of these
2 techniques will occur to those skilled in the art and can be adapted for use with
3 video as well as audio.

4 Referring now to **FIGURE 5**, a process for deriving a music sample as
5 illustrated in **FIGURE 1** is shown as process 200. The process starts at 204. At
6 208, a starting point T_{START} is identified as a fixed time from the beginning of the
7 music file. At 212, a stopping point T_{STOP} is identified as a fixed time into the audio
8 file or equivalently a fixed time at T_{START} . At 218, the data between the starting point
9 T_{START} and the stopping point T_{STOP} is extracted to define the segment of music to
10 be used in creation of the sample. The process then returns at 224. Of course,
11 those skilled in the art will appreciate that the extraction of the data may begin as
12 soon as the starting point is identified. The extraction can then proceed until the
13 sample time has expired or until the stopping point T_{STOP} is encountered.

14 Referring now to **FIGURE 6**, a process 240 starting at 244 describes the
15 processes for extracting a sample segment from file 150 of **FIGURE 3** in file 170
16 of **FIGURE 4**. At 248 the header 174 is scanned for a sample start flag for starting
17 time or starting packet identifier. At 252 the music file or header is scanned for the
18 sample stop flag (or time or packet ID.) At 256 the data between the sample start
19 and sample stop indicators (flag, time or packet ID) to define the sample segment
20 to be used for ultimate creation of music clippings. The process returns at 260. Of
21 course, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the extraction of the data may
22 begin as soon as the starting point is identified. The extraction can then proceed
23 until the sample time has expired or until the stopping point T_{STOP} is encountered.

24 Referring now to **FIGURE 7**, a variation of process 200 of **FIGURE 5** is
25 illustrated starting at 282. At 208, the starting point is identified as a fixed time from
26 the beginning of the music selection. Control then passes to 288 where the music
27 genre is identified. This can be accomplished by data supplied in a header such
28 as header 174, by user selection or any other suitable mechanism. In the case of
29 genre A, control passes to 290 where a stopping point is identified as the starting

1 point plus a fixed time T1 into the music file. Control then passes to 292 where the
2 data is extracted between the starting point and stopping point to provide the
3 sample segment from the current music selection and the process returns at 294.
4 However, if the music genre is determined to be B at 288, control passes to 298
5 where the stopping point is identified as the starting point plus a different time T2
6 into the music file. Control then passes to 292 as previously. In accordance with
7 this embodiment, multiple types of music can be sampled to generate a more
8 suitable sample based upon the type of music being sampled. Thus, genre A may
9 be considered popular music while genre B may be classical music with T1
10 equaling 30 seconds and T2 equaling 60 seconds. While the process 280 is
11 illustrated as having only two selections A and B, those skilled in the art will
12 appreciate that any number of such selections are possible and can be defined to
13 most closely match an appropriate time period for the selection of the sample
14 based upon the particular type of music, audio video or other program material.

15 Samples created in accordance with any of the processes described above
16 can be carried out by the end user, retail establishment, record company, publicist,
17 marketing concern, artist or other private or commercial entity interested in
18 promoting the audio selection.

19 The process just described can be implemented as a computer program or
20 script operating as a portion of, for example, a computer media player. However,
21 many other implementations are possible without departing from the present
22 invention. In one alternative embodiment, an email enabled personal audio player
23 can embody the functionality of the present invention, with email facilities provided
24 via wireless or wired communication. The compressed music sample previously
25 described can be generated as part of a media player in one embodiment of the
26 invention so that a user can advantageously produce a music sample of a currently
27 playing music selection and with a single click of a computer screen icon, push of
28 a button or other interface, initiate a process for sending that music sample to a
29 friend (or potential customer).

1 **FIGURE 8** shows a simplified user interface for a media player 310. Media
2 players similar to those provided by Microsoft, Real Networks as well as ATI and
3 other corporations can be modified to provide this function. In the illustrative
4 interface 310 shown in **FIGURE 8**, a display window 314 displays the artist and the
5 name of the selection being played. Window 316 displays the elapsed time in this
6 selection. Various play control buttons are provided such as search forward button
7 320, scan forward button 322, search backwards button 324, scan backwards
8 button 326, pause button 328 and start/stop button 330 in a familiar arrangement.
9 In addition, the interface includes a button labeled as "send to friend" button 336.
10 In other embodiments an icon such as an email envelope icon or the like can be
11 also utilized. In this embodiment, the media player can send a sample of the
12 currently playing selection to a friend, acquaintance or potential purchaser by use
13 of the button 336. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other user interfaces
14 could also be used without departing from the invention.

15 **FIGURE 9** illustrates a process 350 starting at 352 for utilizing the media
16 player 310 to send an email music sample to a friend or other recipient. At 356 the
17 music player application associated with interface 310 of **FIGURE 8** is launched
18 and proceeds to normal player operation at 360. The media player at 360 operates
19 in a normal fashion under control of the user to play compact discs, .MP3 files,
20 .AAC files, .WMA files or other recorded media in a conventional manner until such
21 time as the user operates the "send to friend" control 336 as detected at 364.
22 When this occurs, an email application is launched at 368, which automatically
23 creates a new email message at 372. Control then passes to 376 where a music
24 sample file is attached (if it currently exists) or is created according to one of the
25 processes previously described (or any other suitable process) and then attached
26 to the new email. Control then passes to 380 where an address book function is
27 launched so that the user can select recipients at 384. The user continues to
28 select recipients for the email at 384 until completed at 388 at which point the user
29 is passed to a conventional email edit screen wherein a new message can be

1 created or edited at 392. The email functions just described can be carried out
2 using an adaptation of software programs such as Microsoft Outlook™, Microsoft
3 Outlook Express™ or Lotus Notes™ as well as other email programs commercially
4 available.

5 When the user has completed entering and editing the email message and
6 recipients at 392, then the user elects to send the email by clicking a send button
7 at 396 to cause the email to be sent at 398. Control then returns to 360 for normal
8 media player operation. While **FIGURE 10** illustrates a sequential process wherein
9 the normal media player operation is illustrated as a functional block that is
10 separate and distinct from the process of sending the email, in preferred
11 embodiments of the invention, the media player continues to play the music
12 selection in the background while the creation of the email is carried out. This can
13 be accomplished using various known techniques including buffering of the music
14 and running the media player application as a background task. Other techniques
15 can also be employed to permit the user to continue listening to music throughout
16 the process described by 364 through 410 without departing from the invention. In
17 other embodiments, the email can be created and buffered for later transmission
18 when an email application is opened. Other variations will occur to those skilled
19 in the art.

20 **FIGURE 10** illustrates a process 400 for carrying out a simplified process
21 similar to that of process 350 of **FIGURE 9**. However, in process 400, a single click
22 of the "send to friend" icon 336 initiates the creation and/or attachment of the music
23 sample file at 376. Control then passes to 404 where the email is addressed to
24 one or more default recipients. A default message (e.g., "Here is a song sample
25 I think you might like.") is inserted at 408 and the email is sent at 410 without any
26 user intervention after clicking "send to friend". Of course, this presupposes that
27 there has been an initial creation of default messages, default recipients, etc. In
28 accordance with the embodiment of process 400, a predefined list of recipients
29 automatically receives the music sample whenever the user clicks on the "send to

1 friend" icon 336 with no further action required by the user. Those skilled in the art
2 will recognize that numerous variations of this process are possible wherein, for
3 example, a default message and recipient list is provided but the user is given the
4 opportunity to edit them prior to actually sending the email. (For example, a
5 window can be displayed giving the user, e.g., 5 seconds to click a button to
6 change from defaults. Otherwise, the default message is sent to the default
7 recipient along with the sample.) Moreover, process 350 and process 400 can be
8 varied as to the order of the specific operations carried out without departing from
9 the invention.

10 **FIGURE 11** illustrates another use for the music sample created as
11 previously described within the context of conventional electronic mail. **FIGURE 11**
12 shows a window used to create electronic mail message in an exemplary email
13 software application. This exemplary user interface is similar to that used by
14 numerous commercially available email applications and includes conventional
15 addressing and editing functions as well as an "attach" icon 434 plus an "attach
16 menu" icon 438. In this embodiment, the "attach" icon 434 is used to attach a
17 default music sample and message to the current email. The "attach menu" icon
18 438 is used to produce the default attachment and determine that it is to be sent
19 to all emails or simply the emails selected using the "attach" icon 434.

20 Referring now to **FIGURE 12**, "attach menu" icon 438 can be utilized to
21 produce a drop down "attach" menu 440, and simplifies the process of attaching
22 music sample files to an email message. In this embodiment, the drop down menu
23 440 permits the user to select a particular music file for attachment at 442 and
24 provides the option of attaching the sample to a single email at 444 or to save the
25 attachment as a default to be attached to all outgoing emails at 446 or whenever
26 icon 434 is selected from within an email document. The "select file to attach"
27 selection 442 can operate using a conventional browsing function as is commonly
28 provided in Microsoft Windows compatible applications or using any other suitable
29 mechanism. Selections 444 and 446 may provide access to a text editing function

1 for providing a remark or comment to be attached as, for example, a footer to the
2 email along with the sample file and further determines that the sample is attached
3 to a single email or all emails. Whenever 444 or 446 is selected, the attachment
4 created becomes the default attachment if so desired by the user (e.g., by checking
5 a "default attachment" box in the attachment creation process) until cleared using
6 selection 448. Whenever 446 is selected, the attachment including a music
7 sample is attached to all emails sent out by the user until the selection is changed.

8 **FIGURE 13** illustrates a completed email message including a footer-like
9 comment 452 regarding the music sample attachment and a music sample file
10 illustrated as an icon 456 which the recipient of the email can click (e.g., with a
11 mouse) in order to play or save the sample file.

12 **FIGURE 14** illustrates another embodiment of a completed file in which
13 rather than sending a sample file such as 456, the user is able to provide a footer
14 including a text message 466 along with a Universal Resource Locator (URL) 470
15 that directs the recipient to a web site or web page on the Internet identified by URL
16 470. In this example, the URL 470 will, in one embodiment, provide the user with
17 a streaming audio sample of the song desired. In this case, the song sample might
18 be provided by a record company, record production company, retail music outlet,
19 electronic retailer (e-tailer), etc. and may also provide the recipient with access to
20 a purchase option and/or other information regarding the music selection being
21 sampled.

22 The format of email 430 described in connection with **FIGURE 14** is also
23 conducive to an email music marketing arrangement as illustrated in **FIGURE 15**.
24 **FIGURE 15** illustrates an Enterprise network 500, which might represent a music
25 company, retail establishment, e-tailer or other Enterprise with interests in
26 promoting a particular recording. The Enterprise includes a network 502 of
27 computers attached by some common local network and/or wide area network,
28 wiring arrangement illustrated as 504. Attached to this network may be a plurality
29 of client computers and servers shown as 506 and 508. In addition, the Enterprise

1 utilizes an Enterprise email server 510 having an associated database 516. For
2 Enterprise 500, all electronic mail passes through the Enterprise email server 510
3 and is then either routed back to internal computers for the target address or sent
4 out over the Internet 520 or other suitable network to reach destination computers
5 such as 522, 524 and 526. In accordance with this embodiment, if the Enterprise
6 wishes to promote a particular artist, the Enterprise email server 510 can be utilized
7 to attach a footer to each outgoing email message incorporating a music sample
8 or URL to a particular music sample. In this manner, the Enterprise can capitalize
9 upon hundreds or thousands of electronic email messages going out each day
10 from the Enterprise to various recipients as a marketing tool to further promote a
11 particular artist.

12 **FIGURE 16** illustrates a process 550 as just described wherein the email
13 server is started at 552 and then awaits receipt of a new outgoing email from a
14 client computer at 554. Once a new email message is received from a client
15 computer for distribution either internally (if desired) or over Internet 520, a music
16 sample attachment (or URL to a sample) is retrieved at 560 from the servers
17 storage system 516. The email message is then appended to the email at 564
18 before forwarding the email to the recipient at 570. Thus, each email transmitted
19 by the Enterprise can be used as a marketing tool for a particular artist. If desired,
20 the particular song sample being sent can be varied randomly, in accordance with
21 time or according to any other suitable scheme that fits the marketing strategy of
22 the Enterprise.

23 In another embodiment consistent with the present invention, the general
24 population can be enlisted as marketers for music marketing. Referring back to
25 **FIGURE 14**, an email message as illustrated can be used as a basis to accumulate
26 affinity points (similar to frequent flyer miles or hotel club miles) for participating in
27 promotion of a favorite artist. Consider, for example, that the sender (Bob) of email
28 430 signs up with a music marketing concern to help promote their music. By
29 sending music samples out along with all of Bobs' email, he may generate interest

1 in the song and album from which a particular sample is taken. In this case, Bob
2 may, for example, register his own samples with the music marketing concern or
3 may receive the samples periodically by email or from a web site, for example, from
4 the marketing concern. A process such as that illustrated in **FIGURE 17** can then
5 be used to accumulate "credits" for an affinity program associated with the music
6 marketing concern. Such credits may, for example, provide the user with
7 discounts, free merchandise or contest entries from the marketer to encourage the
8 distribution of samples.

9 Process 600 starts at 602 after which the sender sends an email to a
10 recipient with the email including a Universal Resource Locator to a music sample
11 at 606. Upon receipt of this email, the recipient may use the URL at 610 to visit the
12 site with the music sample and either receive a download of the music sample or
13 receive the music sample as a streaming audio sample from the site at 614. The
14 site also may provide a purchase option at 620 to the sample recipient as well as
15 providing other information and/or offers. At 624, if the recipient decides to make
16 a purchase, the sender may receive an affinity credit based upon the purchase at
17 630. The process ends at 634.

18 There are many ways of implementing the process just described. For
19 example, the recipient may be required to supply the email address of the sender
20 of the email in order for the recipient to receive a discount toward the purchase of
21 the music selection or other purchases at the web site. This provides the merchant
22 with the sender's identifying information so that the sender's account can be
23 credited with affinity credits. In another embodiment, invoking the URL 470 actually
24 invokes a Java applet which extracts the source of the email and forwards it to the
25 web site in a manner transparent to the user as the user is directed to the web site
26 to receive this streaming audio sample. Those skilled in the art will recognize that
27 there are many other ways of implementing the present invention.

28 **FIGURE 18** illustrates a variation of the embodiment shown in **FIGURE 17**
29 as process 650 starting at 654. At 656 the sender sends an email to the recipient

1 including an actual music sample plus a URL that directs the user to a web site
2 wherein a full copy of the selection can be purchased. At 660 the recipient plays
3 the music sample and at 666 the recipient uses the URL to separately go to a site
4 with information and purchase options. Should the recipient make a purchase at
5 670, the sender receives credits from the site to his affinity account based upon the
6 purchase at 674 and the process ends at 680. A sample email illustrating use of
7 a URL as well as a music sample is illustrated in **FIGURE 19**. In this illustration,
8 the footer also includes remarks 452 as well as an icon 456 for accessing the
9 music sample. In addition, the remarks include a link to a web site 690 where the
10 user can make a purchase of the full selection.

11 The mechanics of an actual purchase, as well as the nature of the sample
12 can be varied in many ways without departing from the present invention. For
13 example, the sample may be a small part of a full file containing the entire music
14 selection. In such an embodiment only a small portion of the file is readily available
15 for play by the recipient. In order to make the purchase of the full version of the
16 music selection; the user need not download a full copy since a full copy is already
17 available. The user merely purchases a key used to decrypt the song. Numerous
18 variations on this theme are also possible. For example, the entire file may be
19 available for sampling in its entirety with an encryption function that only permits
20 one play until it is decrypted after paying for the music.

21 Those skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention has been
22 described in terms of exemplary embodiments based upon use of a programmed
23 processor such as that residing in a personal computer or personal music player.
24 However, the invention should not be so limited, since the present invention could
25 be implemented using hardware component equivalents such as special purpose
26 hardware and/or dedicated processors which are equivalents to the invention as
27 described and claimed. Similarly, general purpose computers, microprocessor
28 based computers, micro-controllers, optical computers, analog computers,
29 dedicated processors and/or dedicated hard wired logic may be used to construct
30 alternative equivalent embodiments of the present invention.